

critical digest

Vol. II No. 15

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The Weekly That Keeps You Informed of the Current Broadway Critical Scene

N.Y. Openings This Week

Mr. Barry's Etchings-48th Street Theatre, 1/31/50. Lee Tracy stars in Brock Pemberton production of comedy by Walter Bullock and Daniel Archer. Vicki Cummings and Scott McKay are featured in the cast directed by Pemberton and Margaret Perry.

The Innocents-Playhouse, 2/1/50. Adaptation by William Archibald of Henry James classic "The Turn of the Screw" is presented by Peter Cookson. Beatrice Straight and Isobel Elson share the leading roles, staged by Peter Glenville.

Arms and the Girl-46th Street Theatre, 2/2/50. Theatre Guild and Anthony Farrel offer musical version of "The Pursuit of Happiness". Nanette Fabray, Georges Guetary, John Conte and Pearl Bailey head the cast. Morton Gould did the music, and the book is by Herbert and Dorothy Fields. Rouben Mamoulian is the director.

Quick Glance at New N.Y. Shows -- digests on inside pages

The Cocktail Party-Miller, 1/2/50. T.S. Eliot's new play was greeted with high compliments by most of the critics, though Atkinson and Hawkins didn't believe there was enough dramatics in it. Play and leading characters were cited as best play and acting jobs respectively of this or any recent season by several of the afternoon paper critics. There was a wide difference of opinion on what Eliot's play tries to prove.

Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Rodgers and Hammerstein production of Samuel Taylor's comedy found most of the critics rooting for it. Almost all agreed play taken from Robert Fontaine story was more of a series of sketches than a play. Pollock, Compass and Watts, Post filed "con" reviews on the grounds that the characters and theme of the play was much too familiar.

Shows That Closed

That Lady-Beck, 11/22/49-1/28/50. Majority of critics felt Kate O'Brien's script was much too heavy and too dull even for the fans of Katherine Cornell. Produced and staged by her husband, Guthrie McClintic the production was "okayed" by critics from Times, World Telegram, Brooklyn Eagle, Newark News and Billboard.

Design for Stained Glass Window-Mansfield, 1/23/50-1/28/50. Jack Segastura production of Berncy and Richardson historical drama starring Martha Scott found few friends among the critics. Only Field, Newark News, liked the play. Rest felt the authors had a good theme, but a poor play.

Magazine Reviewers Look at the New Plays

The Member of the Wedding-Empire, 1/5/50. After reading the critics reviews, George Jean Nathan can't understand what they are praising. In his opinion the Carson McCullers dramatization lacks everything that makes for good theatre. Phelan, Commonweal, joined the majority who praised the play.

The Enchanted-Lyceum, 1/18/50. Though critics from Billboard and Time liked the new comedy by Valency and Giraudoux, the reviewers from Variety, Newsweek, Cue and New Yorker didn't think it rated nearly as good as The Madwoman of Chaillot.

The Man-Fulton, 1/19/50. Melodrama found new admirers from the magazine critics who like scary plays. McCarten, New Yorker, and the critic of Time panned the production on several grounds.

Negro Critics Claim Brushoff on Ticket List

Drama critics of N.Y. Amsterdam News, Afro-American and Pittsburgh Courier charged at a press conference that Broadway producers discriminated against them in handing out opening night tickets. Variety's survey of press agents revealed that critics of Negro press receive same treatment as members of other specialized papers when given "second night" tickets. First night tickets go to closely knit group of 51 persons, while second night tickets go to all legitimate critics who seek them. Movie companies were also rapped for their ticket policies.

The Cocktail Party

a. Times --Con-- Verbose and elusive drama that has to be respected, comes closer to theatre than Eliot's previous plays. This theatre goer does not understand his dogma, but recognizes that it is genuine and worth understanding by means of the script. Play is too compact and too allusive to be assimilated from the stage. Acted by lucid and accomplished players, performance is thoroughly intelligible and enjoyable. Leaves theatre goer impressed, not enlightened.-Atkinson.

b. Herald Tribune --Pro-- Written more eloquently than theatrically, lines have savage and repetitious intensity, able company keeps verse controlled and communicative. Resolution of imponderable thesis is confused, but not fault of an immaculate production. Too little emotional substance, and no catharsis. Guinness is fine, rest good. Eventful piece of theatre, if somewhat disappointing.-Barnes.

c. News --Pro-- A masterpiece of the modern stage, beautifully acted. Unusual work, one of the most enjoyable comedies imaginable, performers are splendid, Guinness so intelligent and charming as to be superb.-Chapman.

d. Mirror --Pro-- Not condescending, not escapist entertainment, but the result of a synthesis of poetry, science and faith spoken magnificently with inspired direction. Guinness is great actor, Flomyng has difficulty with verse. One of the great plays of our time, wonderful experience in the theatre.-Coleman.

e. Compass --Pro-- Slickest piece of play writing and play acting of the season. Played with sureness and precision, written playfully and artfully and with great seriousness all at the same time. Eliot can write for theatre with astonishing adroitness and clarity. Marvelously neat, tidy, tight. Worth best in fine cast. Guinness has tendency to overplay. Play, production of superlative smartness.-Pollock.

f. Post --Pro-- The stage at its illustrious best, an authentic modern masterpiece, one of the two or three finest plays of the post-war English speaking stage. Beautifully written, superbly played. Virtue of play that each spectator is likely to find different ideas and symbols in it, depending on qualities of heart and mind he brings to it. I think it just opposite point of "Iceman Cometh". Guinness may be the most accomplished actor extant.-Watts.

g. World Telegram and Sun --Con-- Three hour treatise on uses of life, written in verse and dialogue. See little reason why American public should attempt to embrace the form of the intellectual duel. Players are expert and intelligent in the proper style, Guinness achieves a plastic omniscient air in manner of a peacock spring Gypsy Rose Lee. Flomyng only character that draws any sympathy.-Hawkins.

h. Journal American --Pro-- Masterpiece, worthily performed, the one great comedy in town. Not a play for everybody, but a play for me. Cast worthy of fine play, work as if it and the play were one, not afraid of the verse.-Garland.

i. Brooklyn Eagle --Pro-- Immensely fascinating and thought provoking work that operates with varying success on two main levels of high comedy and drama. Lacks warmth, humanity and logical development, but has beautiful, powerful dialogue, superlatively fine performance. Reviewer should see it twice to understand all the layers of meaning. It is engrossing, if sometimes puzzling, theatre piece.-Sheaffor.

Dorothy Gish Roads Reviews Three Weeks After Opening

Dorothy Gish, star of The Man is in no rush to read the drama reviews, Leonard Lyons reports. She always reads them three weeks after the opening. By following this practice Miss Gish says she avoids getting a swelled head if the notices are too good, or become crushed if they are too bad.

The Happy Time

"Pro Reviews"

a. Times -- Humorous sketch played by some ingratiating comedians with general good nature. Not a work of art. Tender gallant and funny, close enough to truth to dismiss audience in glow of good spirits. Though first half is too much like burlesque.-Atkinson.

c. News -- Folksy, affectionate comedy, adroitly acted by the pleasantest lot of people you'd ever want to meet. Congratulations to all involved.-Chapman.

c. World Telegram and Sun -- Written with brimming heart, infinite taste and most luxurious humor. All connected with it should be lauded.-Hawkins.

g. Brooklyn Eagle -- Good show, rather than a good play. Staged expertly, given first rate performance. Stewart is occasionally too cute. Show drew almost continuous laughter.-Sheaffer.

b. Herald Tribune -- Tender, moving funny story, ably interpreted. Cast imbues it with immense life and laughter. Show is as happy as title would make you believe, a joyous addition to season's offerings.-Barnes.

d. Mirror -- Glowing, charming story with fine cast in one of the season's most delightful plays. Tremendously amusing and heart warming comedy.-Coleman.

f. Journal American -- Entrancing new comedy of life, love and adolescence. Cast is perfect, one of seasons most thoroughly welcome newcomers.-Garland.

h. Newark News -- Lives up to its cheerful and appropriate title, amiable play, presented with rare persuasion and great fun. Few comedies seem as mirthfully diverting.-Field.

"Con Reviews"

i. Compass -- After poor first act comedy blossoms into tender, humorous thing that will attract crowds. Fine acting less wooden when given something to do. Actors can't do wonders, but they miss no opportunity.-Pollock.

j. Post -- Like many other recent plays, but does have a few points of entertainment. Desultory and only intermittently entertaining comedy, which rarely achieves the effectiveness of a satisfying play.-Watts.

O'Neill Rejects Nathan's Idea of Entertainment

Eugene O'Neill, according to Leonard Lyons, phone George Jean Nathan at Cape Cod complaining about the lack of activity. He turned down the critic's suggestion that he go swimming at night with a candle on top of his head to keep warm, on the grounds it might attract attention.

Hi Phillips Plays It Straight for The Velvet Glove

Hi Phillips, now conducting his humor column in the World Telegram and Sun praised Grace George and Walter Hampden for their fine work in the Rosemary Casey play. "Extra satisfying" was his summation of the show.

The Member of the Wedding -- Director's Notes

Harold Clurman, director of The Member of the Wedding and critic for New Republic, put down his thoughts on his production rather than reviewing his own work. He is convinced that the cast follows the line of action he sensed as the director. The job of the director was to find a physical or visual equivalent for every emotion that is the concomitant of the action, Clurman wrote. The director credits the producers for the success of the play because they had the faith in the public liking something that was different. Clurman regained his faith in the sensitivity and awareness of the New York theatre going public as a result of the play.

The Member of the Wedding

a. George Jean Nathan --Con-- Critics reaction was what you might expect, intention and hope were whooped up as if they were factual performances. There was an enormous amount of ingenuity in accounting creditably for the absence of vital and necessary dramatic elements. Doings are doubly static and monotonous. Acting is satisfactory enough, but somehow fails to be moving. Direction may have forced it into too high and strained a key.

b. Commonweal --Pro-- It is a complete delight. Director and three leads have not wasted any skill, understanding, high talents and love in forwarding the theme. Nothing too good to say about Harris. Director has built a fine play, actors play it to the hilt. Author has had good theatrical luck in this.-Phelan.

Alive and Kicking

c. George Jean Nathan --Con-- There is plenty of kicking in its dancing department but breath isn't visible on most of the other parts of the mirror.

d. Variety --Con-- Not often, fortunately is so much production squandered on so little material. For all its months of preparation the show isn't even a near miss. Except for Cole's stunning dances there are only sporadic interruptions in the noisy tedium. No memorable songs or impressive singers in show.-Hobe.

e. Billboard --Con-- Efforts of such a combination should add up to fast, polished stem revue, but it doesn't. Most of what it has to offer has been done before. Some compensations, but the moments are too few. Looks like too many people had fingers in the pie and nobody came up with a plum.-Francis.

f. Newsweek --Con-- Aside from some exciting dances revue never rises above the mediocre. Sum of good jobs by Burns and Lonorgan does not equal a real good show. Inspirational broth seems to have curdled in direct ratio to number of cooks at hand.

g. Time --Con-- Turns bright just often enough to accentuate its general dullness. A mussy show, acts don't move in procession. Mechanical show. Lonorgan should make good comedienne when she gets the right comedy.

h. Cue --Con-- Revue with three perfectly good comics, plus one celebrated dancer doesn't add up to average entertainment. Cole wonderful to watch, but couldn't find much reason in most of his dance schemes. Allusions to private life of public figures pretty emotive stuff.-Gabriol.

i. New Yorker --Con-- Good soft shoe dance by Van somewhere in show, but rest is uniformly depressing. Let's say all members of the cast try hard, and leave it at that.-McCalten.

Guinness Notes First Night Rush Out of Theatre

Though there was no morning paper deadline to make after the Saturday night opening of The Cocktail Party, many people rushed up the aisles before the curtain calls, Alec Guinness reported to Variety.

The Enchanted

"Pros"

a. Billboard -- Should delight a great many people, hard to see why anyone could dislike it. Told with skill and charm, albeit with some metaphysical confusions. Rates as good or better success span as Madwoman. MacGrath gives girl a sensitive loveliness-

Francis.

b. Times -- Frequently enchanting, in spite of weakness. Fantasy saved from allegorical patness by its doubling back on itself and by its gay, vigilant, irony... Seldom human, but always human. Staging far from bad.

"Cons"

c. Variety -- Isn't likely to duplicate success of Madwoman for all its wit and beauty. Play is gossamer and thin, good moments outweighed by the dull. Excellent acting, fine staging and production but lacks substance, is too wayward and light.-Bron.

c. Cuc -- None of megaphonic marvel, defiant flaunt of Madwoman. MacGrath could be warmer and less measured. Felt I was shnozzle-deep in a field of roses, made of the best grade muslin. Play that reads like a dream, but on stage acts like group of icicles.-Gabriel.

d. Newsweek -- Admirers of Madwoman will be disappointed, others will be confused by tedious fantasy. Work is illuminated by passages of beauty. Last act bogs, byplay is often baffling.

f. New Yorker -- Sounds as if written by collaboration of Sroyan, Thornton and Burgess and the publicity director of Woodlawn. What leads say is never clear. MacGrath bears up longer than anyone has right to expect.-McCarten.

The Man

g. Variety --So-So-- Out and out thriller, but author not entirely successful in first play writing attempt. Might be good situation for half hour radio drama or one actor, but too dragged out for full length play. Still packs exciting wallop in its lurid, surprise finish.-Hobe.

h. Journal of Commerce --Pro-- Suspense packed play with harrowing situations that sustain unbelievable tension for the viewers. Garner does charming job. Others excellent. Have a medical check-up first, then see this blood curdler.-Colby.

i. Wall St. Journal --Pro-- If you are one who believes that a good scare never hurt anyone, The Man is your man. Hammer is master of his madness and the evening, he does an excellent job.-Cooke.

j. Morning Telegraph --So-So-- Melodrama reaches intermittent heights of chilling suspense, if not for leads unerring power it would not be as good as it is. Can't tell what keeps from making it perfect, but author does know a psychopath when he sees one. Would be better if action of play speeded up a little.-Bolton.

Tale of a Drama Critic, an Entertainer and a Parrot

Compass critic Arthur Pollock, recently photographed Jimmy Savo, but didn't print the pictures due to the water shortage, Paul Denis reveals. Savo made a deal with Pollock, he would make up the difference in water by washing his pet parrot in claret wine instead of water. Savo insists the parrot hiccupped "And I've been on the water wagon all my life. This is the life!"

Pittsburgh Drama Critic Resumes Broadcasts

Harold V. Cohen, drama editor and columnist for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette will return to the air with his once weekly show business review.

Sobol Would Like to See Pegler Cast in Show

Louis Sobol, Journal American, would buy his own tickets to a show which featured Westbrook Pegler and Bugs Baer. Sobol offered this suggestion after noting the ovation Pegler received after his talk at the recent testimonial for Nick Kenny. The columnist would also underwrite the reviews of such an affair.

Design for a Stained Glass Window

a. Times --Con-- Theme deserves better play, lacks taste, filled with pretty hackneyed writing. Direction frequently as tasteless as the writing, but cast has some good actors in it. Scott plays with sincerity, frankness, strength.-Atkinson.

b. Herald Tribune --Con-- Diffuse and awkward stage biography treated with more dignity than imagination and passion. Ponderous rather than uplifting in spite of Scott sometimes translucent portrayal. Play is sincere and soporific.-Barnes.

c. News --Con-- Visually gorgeous production, honorably conceived but rather tiresomely executed. Scott played too quietly and gently, authors have put in too many words. Enough sub-plots to keep it lively, but words slow play down.-Chapman.

d. Mirror --Con-- Sincere and sometimes moving play, but authors failed to invest it with philosophic insight. Not enough to recommend in it. Scott is lovely and earnest. Lacks color, drive, imagination of Dark of the Moon.-Coleman.

e. Compass --Con-- Some excitement in last act, but actors to achieve it must elbow their way through cliches which leave them out of breath by end of evening. Not a fresh phrase or idea in the whole play. Actors do best they can.-Pollock.

f. Post --Con-- Earnest, well intentioned and hopelessly inept play entangled in feeble theatrics. Neither acting nor direction is of much help. Scott never really credible in the role. Never real or tragic in telling of a real story.-Watts.

g. World Telegram and Sun --Con-- Starts out with fair amount of action, but gradually bogs down under a weight of words. Chief fault is lack of characterization leads actors to play simple roles straight which results in a lack of texture. Scott plays with gentle simplicity, rest good.-Hawkins.

h. Journal American --Con-- So static a play that the greater part of it never comes across the footlights. Sitting in an overheated auditorium, it seems like none of your affair. Can be remembered for bringing Carroll McComas back to stage.-Garland.

i. Brooklyn Eagle --Con-- Prosy, lethargic affair, clumsily motivated and feebly expressed. Sincerity is the play's only consistent virtue. Most of time actors are thin, juicless figures mouthing empty speeches. Play is waste of some capable players and an inspiring story.-Sheaffer.

j. Newark News --Pro-- Solomn play written with obvious sincerity. Scott gives charming, delicate performance, rest of cast good in uncovnly written parts. Far better suited to art theatre presentation than Broadway. Clanton inclined to overact, but think this is director's fault.-Field.

k. Woman's Wear Daily --Con-- More luminosity in the title than in the drama itself, halo of the spiritual fervor of the event has escaped the authors. Seems as if Scott's interpretation could have stood more devotion and more dedication. Gave impression of aloofness, and sometimes is inaudible.-Dash.

Morhouse Picks Lunt as Top Living Actor

Ward Morhouse, noting Richard Watts review of The Cocktail Party which picked Guinness as the top living actor of the day, said he will hold out for Alfred Lunt.

The Man

a. Cue --Pro-- Skillful thriller which deserves a degree cum laude in psychopathology, domestic brand. If you have nerves, prepare to scrape them here. Two leads deserve most of praise, though author, producer, director share credits. --Gabriel.

b. Newsweek --Pro-- Guaranteed to keep your hackles standing at attention for a good part of the evening, Gish and Hammer go a long way toward making up for the slack moments. Author contrives too many tricks to keep up suspense.

c. Time --Con-- Gish and Hammer performances are far better than the play. Theatrically play is too low for a hawk, too high for a buzzard; lacks proper seriousness of clinical study or the proper tingle for a thriller.

d. New Yorker --Con-- A rather unalarming little piece, in spite of its unquestionably macabre ingredients. Conversations between two main characters are by necessity elemental and repetitious. Central situation may need some extra elaborations of the plot, and addition of a few more sub-characters to save it from monotony. --Gibbs.

Design for a Stained Glass Window

e. Journal of Commerce --Con-- A pulpit, not theatre, found at this playhouse. Scott steers clear of the affected attitudes of rest of the cast. For a deeply religious theme, one needs expert writing, plus inspired acting. Both missing. --Colby.

f. Wall Street Journal --So-So-- Play not by any means equal to the concept, not until final scene does it become dramatic. Scott contribution not enough to make up for shortcomings. May be of interest to Catholics and Protestants from historical point of view. --Cooke.

g. Morning Telegraph --Con-- Slow, glacial pace written with reverence and knowledge of subject. Scott often unbearable toward back of the house. Cast works hard with the material on hand. Good to see McComas back. Authors need a good spanking this morning for their job. --Bolton.

Key to N.Y.C. Criticism At A Glance

Reviewers are rated as to how they like the show, not if they think it will be a hit. "Pro" means the reviewer recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. "Con" means he doesn't recommend it as such. "So-So" means the reviewer did not state his preference directly.

1. NY Times	11. Newark News	21. Catholic World
2. NY Herald Tribune	12. Women's Wear Daily	22. Commonwealth
3. NY News	13. Daily Worker	23. Cue
4. NY Mirror	14. Wall Street Journal	24. Ch. Sci. Monitor
5. NY Compass (Star, PM)	15. Journal of Commerce	25. Sat. Review Lit.
6. NY Post	16. George Jean Nathan	26. Newsweek
7. NY Sun (Murchouse)	17. Morning Telegraph	27. Time
8. NY Journal American	18. Variety	28. Nation
9. NY World Telegram and Sun	19. Billboard	29. New Republic
10. Brooklyn Eagle	20. Theatre Arts	30. New Yorker

Durling Confused by Drama Critics

Trying to figure out if the reviewers like a show is like battling with a crossword puzzle. E.V. Durling, Journal American admitted.

N.Y.C. Criticism At A Glance -- see page 790 for key

Alive and Kicking - Winter Garden, 1/17/50. Pro: 5-8-9-17. Con: 1-2-3-4-6-10-11-12-16-18-19-23-26-27-30. So-So: 14.

Caesar and Cleopatra - National, 12/21/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-10-11-12-14-15-16-17-18-19-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30. Con: 5-8-13. So-So: 9.

Clutterbuck - Biltmore, 12/3/49. Pro: 3-5-6-7-8-12-15-17-19-23-27-30. Con: 1-9-11-13-16-18-22-24-26-28-29. So-So: 2-4-10-14.

Death of a Salesman - Morosco, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: Nation. So-So: Time

Detective Story - Hudson, 3/23/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-12-14-15-17-18-19-20-22-23-26-27-30.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes - Ziegfeld, 12/8/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-24-26-29-30. Con: 6-28. So-So: 16-19-22-23-27.

I Know My Love - Shubert, 11/1/49. Pro: 2-3-4-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-23-24-25-26-28. Con: 1-5-16-20-22-27-29-30.

Kiss Me Kate - Century, 12/31/48. Pro: 28 votes. Con: New Republic.

Lost in the Stars - Music Box, 10/30/49. Pro: 1-2-3-5-6-7-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-23-26. Con: 8-9-13-21-22-24-25-28-29-30. So-So: 4-27.

Miss Liberty - Imperial, 7/15/49. Pro: 4-7-8-12-17-19. Con: 1-2-18-20-22-23-25-27-29. So-So: 3-6-9-21-26.

Mister Roberts - Alvin, 2/13/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-18-19-20-22-23-25-26-27-29-30. Con: 24. So-So: 13-16-17.

South Pacific - Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-12-15-17-18-19-20-24-25-26-30. So-So: 23-27.

Texas Lil' Darlin' - Hollinger, 11/25/49. Pro: 3-6-9-12-13-14-15-16-17-22-24. Con: 1-4-7-8-18-19-23-29-30. So-So: 2-5-10-11-26-27.

The Enchanted - Lyceum, 1/18/50. Pro: 4-5-6-8-9-10-11-12-19-27. Con: 1-2-17-18-23-26-30. So-So: 3-14.

The Man - Fulton, 1/19/50. Pro: 2-4-8-10-11-14-15-23-26. Con: 1-3-5-6-9-12-27-30. So-So: 17-18.

The Member of the Wedding - Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 1-3-4-5-6-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-17-18-19-22-23-24-26-28. Con: 16. So-So: 2-27-30.

The Rat Race - Barrymore, 12/22/49. Pro: 4-15. Con: 2-3-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-16-17-19-22-23-24-27-28-29-30. So-So: 1-18-26.

The Velvet Glove - Booth, 12/26/49. Pro: 3-4-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-17-19-22-24-26. Con: 3-5-16-23-27-30. So-So: 1-6-29.

Touch and Go - Broadhurst, 10/13/49. Pro: 1-3-6-9-11-12-13-15-16-17-23-24-26-27-28-30. Con: 2-4-5-7-14-18-19-20-22. So-So: 8-10-29.

Where's Charley? - St. James, 10/11/48. Pro: 1-2-3-5-8-9-11-14-15-17-18-20-21-23-29-30. Con: 6-7-12-13-16-19-22-24-25-26. So-So: 4-27.

